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MEMORANDUM FOR: DD/I

The Schoenbrun briefing was superb
and I decided to make a record for
posterity. You may be interested in
the portions you missed.



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26 May 1961
(DATE)

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Noted by DB/I
MAY 26
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Briefing by David Schoenbrun on France and Algeria

1. Mr. Schoenbrun gave this briefing to the Board of National Estimates on 23 May. He had been in Algeria for ten days prior to his return to the United States in an effort to get answers to four principal questions:

a. Why did de Gaulle's intelligence fall down on the job?

b. Why did the coup fail and how could four experienced generals have started something which was such a quick flop?

c. Did Debre panic when he announced the impending paratroop drop on Paris, or was he conducting psychological warfare?

d. Is the crisis over?

2. Mr. Schoenbrun found that French intelligence was not caught off base; rather, there was collusion with the plotters. French intelligence and the French police are rotted through with traitors who are not loyal to the regime.

3. Mr. Schoenbrun described de Gaulle as a ghost, who is living the first ten years after his death. He floats in serene majesty above the scene, has power and enormous influence, and dominates by the strength of his personality. The country is actually run, however, by Debre, Frey, Sanganetti (phon.), and a number of other unsavory characters. During the rebellion Debre went to Parliament and said "we cannot fight illegality with legal means." It is shocking that Debre should have made this remark before Parliament of all places, but it indicates the sort of man Debre is. Schoenbrun was surprised at Frey's appointment as Minister of Interior. He is a wild man who is not fit for the job--courageous but not very bright.

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Sanganetti, the number two man in the Ministry, is a gangster. He is a Corsican, and the Corsicans are to the French under-world what the Sicilians are to ours. He has a free hand in the Ministry because he has not been given any departmental duties. In 1956 Biagi--a vermin Fascist--founded the party called the Revolutionary Patriotic Party, and Sanganetti helped him. *SANGUINETH*

4. The people mentioned above and their collaborators do not want to push de Gaulle out now, but are building up a network to take over after he goes, in the name of anti-Communism. There would be some truth in this cry, because if de Gaulle goes, there will be no organized group in France except the Communist Party. The Frey-Sanganetti crowd could probably keep France anti-Communist for a year or two, but would then be succeeded by a popular front. The Communists, as in 1936, might not even ask for cabinet portfolios, but the front would still depend on them, and the Communists would know it. The tragedy is that the Communist Party cannot come to power on its own, but only as part of a counter-rightist force. Mr. Schoenbrun concluded dramatically that there were a lot of lice in de Gaulle's robe.

5. Mr. Schoenbrun then turned to the question of why the coup did not succeed. He said that Challe--who is stupid--is not a Fascist; he is a patriot, basically democratic, and also strongly pro-NATO. He believed that the USSR would outflank the West via Algeria and North Africa and wanted to prevent it. His point is a good one, according to Schoenbrun, but superficial, for if France does not let Algeria go, the latter will go Communist faster.

6. When Challe saw that there were no uprisings in France or even in Algeria, and when the government did not panic and surrender as in 1958, Challe's spirit collapsed. He was crushed by two things. First, de Gaulle was, in effect, challenging Challe to fight a civil war, and Challe knew that he would have to destroy France to save NATO. Second, the Sunday message from President Kennedy had enormous effect. It was a good message delivered at the right time. Schoenbrun remarked that he could not say the same about the President's message of congratulations sent on the Thursday after the coup collapsed.

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7. Debre made his broadcast about the alleged coming of the paratroops on Sunday evening. In his own broadcasts to the U. S. later that evening, Mr. Schoenbrun was trying to say that Debre was a liar without actually using the word. Schoenbrun saw Debre that evening, and Debre appeared to be in a state of panic. This was not true, however, of Andre Malreaux, the Minister of Information. In any case, pushing the panic button had a good effect inside France--the people were ready to fight.

8. A week later Schoenbrun found out about the effect in Algeria. The Debre speech about the paratroop invasion was broadcast over the radio in Algeria every half hour. It made the conscripts furious; they thought in terms of German Foreign Legion paratroopers known for their cruelty jumping on their mothers' homes in Paris. As a result the conscripts were getting ready to shoot their officers. It was this which caused Mr. Schoenbrun to pose the third question above--did Debre panic, or did he put on "the cleverest act of psychological warfare any head of government has ever pulled in a crisis?" (Schoenbrun did not provide an answer.)

9. On the final question, Schoenbrun most emphatically concluded that the crisis is not over and that the root causes of the coup still exist. The Army feels that it has been betrayed by de Gaulle. He promised in 1958 that Algeria would remain French and that no solution would be adopted which the Army could not accept. He has in fact broken these promises. The Army is also shot through with officers who were either disloyal or who acquiesced passively in the coup. Loyalists and rebels are still in the Army together, eyeing each other carefully, and known rebels still exercise their commands. This situation, together with the existence of the Frey-Sanganetti crowd, leaves Mr. Schoenbrun very, very frightened.

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10. In this connection Mr. Schoenbrun remarked that de Gaulle was aware that he had broken his promises to the Army. We should keep in mind, he said, that the Force Frappe is, in a sense, a bribe to the Army by de Gaulle. He is saying, in effect, be loyal to me, go along with me in Algeria, and I will make of you a new Army equipped with modern weapons.

11. With respect to other matters, Schoenbrun stated that General Gambiez ought to be kicked out. After getting the warnings which Walter Kerr described in an earlier briefing to ONE, he did the incredibly stupid thing, as Schonebrun put it,

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of going out on the Zeralda-Algiers Road to have a look. The coup would have failed if Gambiez had immediately gone to the government general building, set up some tanks, and organized the gendarmerie. Algiers was taken with an incredibly small number of men--the fort on the hill, for example, by twelve people. The revolution was clearly a Palace Revolution, which was supposed to attract sympathetic uprisings in Algeria and France.

12. In Mr. Schoenbrun's opinion, it is likely that de Gaulle will be assassinated within the next three months.

13. The story about CIA's encouragement of the coup was stupid but was spread by de Courville himself. However, Schoenbrun had himself heard US officers and (CIA?) agents tell Challe that de Gaulle was the biggest enemy of NATO, and these remarks did play a part in Challe's thinking. The problem was one of indiscreet individuals, not one of CIA.

14. Being nice to de Gaulle is regarded by de Gaulle as a sign of weakness. The US must therefore forget de Gaulle as de Gaulle and stop talking about what a great man he is. We must let him know (in secret) that fourteen nations can get along without him more easily than he can get along without them. This is, in effect, what Churchill told Mendes-France. The French have got to be treated as sick, which they are.

15. Mr. Schoenbrun remarked that if he sounded pessimistic, he was even more pessimistic than he sounded. He felt that France was on the verge of a Spanish decline. Later on he said that France faced 5-10 years of very difficult times. If it pulled through, and its people could be given new inspiration and new direction--say the challenge of participating in a United Europe--then many of the problems it now faces would disappear.

16. Nothing will reverse the movement toward European integration, but its course will be slow and it will bear fruit only over the long run. It is propelled by forces independent of men's wills, including the decline of the individual European states relative to the two super powers, and the loss of the colonies. Even de Gaulle is pushing for a Europe in his own way. Gradualism is the only way toward a united Europe, in view of the disparate history and traditions of the individual countries.

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17. The Communist Party in France has lost strength. It is a party run by old men and still suffers from the black eye it received at the time of the Hungarian revolution. Circumstances could arise, however, in which the Communist Party would gain strength. Most people in France do not look upon de Gaulle as a dictator--he is an authoritarian who loves civil liberties--but if Debre or Soustelle take over the French will react. The Communist Party then becomes the natural ally of the democratic forces.

18. If de Gaulle were to pass from the scene before the Algerian problem is settled and he did so from natural causes, it would be more disastrous to France than if he were assassinated. This is because there would be a normal succession, in this case, to "very bad guys". This succession would cause no great alarm, and nobody could sound a tocsin because all would appear so neat and regular. The men of the coup of 1958 would take over, and would attempt to blackmail the US into assisting them in Algeria by using NATO as a lever. The Arabs would be after us too. We might even have to break with France. Mr. Schoenbrun, however, would choose NATO over the Arabs who would, of course, be blackmailing us with the threat of letting the Russians into North Africa.

19. If de Gaulle is assassinated before the Algerian problem is settled maybe the healthy forces can take hold. In this case, Pinay, Mendes-France, and other moderates would try to make a government of national unity and would threaten Debre with a popular front.

20. If de Gaulle passes from the scene after the Algerian problem is settled, we can breathe a little easier. The Army would still be split, but it would no longer be in Algeria, and no longer poisoned by the frustrations of Algeria. It would then have to be given a new direction, new weapons, and made a modern Army.

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